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ABSTRACT

Service learning is a teaching tool in which students apply classroom skills to solve real problems in their communities. Community service becomes service learning when it is connected to classroom learning and contains opportunities for students to reflect upon their experiences. In addition to enhancing learning through experience, service learning programs offer rural schools and communities an opportunity to develop new and positive connections. Profiles of service learning programs in schools and colleges illustrate the benefits that service learning provides students and communities. K-12 service learning programs in Arkansas, West Virginia, and Alabama involve youth in decision making and staff development training, leading to a sense of ownership and empowerment; allow blind and deaf students to shift roles from passive recipient to active provider of services; and link school reform to community development as student activities focus on community study, support community viability, and celebrate rural life. Service learning programs at colleges and universities include an early intervention, mentoring program that pairs college students with elementary students having similar special talents and interests; programs that promote a sense of citizenship through community development activities and foster compassion through interpersonal relationships with young children, the elderly, and diverse populations; and international exchange programs in rural communities abroad. A list of additional information sources contains 42 references, 3 Internet resources, and 13 organizations. (SV)

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SERVICE LEARNING BENEFITS STUDENTS, COMMUNITIES

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Service learning benefits students, communities

Across rural America, students are engaging in service learning. Children at the West Virginia School for the Blind phone senior citizens in the community to make sure they are well. In Michigan, nursing students at Alpena Community College are paired with residents of a nursing home. Teams of students from Kansas State University spend the summer working on projects in rural communities in Kansas and in Latin America.

Service learning is a teaching tool in which students apply classroom skills to solve real life problems in their communities. A form of experiential learning, service learning enhances learning by placing learning in the context of real life situations. Service learning is, however, more than discrete acts of community service. Community service becomes service learning when it is connected to classroom learning and contains opportunities for students to reflect upon their experiences.

The provisions of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 encourage schools and institutions to develop service learning programs. Many schools and postsecondary institutions have been able to build upon existing student service activities. By adding a reflection component and more fully integrating community service activities into the curriculum, these schools have transformed their existing volunteer activities into service learning. Others have created new programs.

In addition to enhancing learning, service learning programs offer rural schools and communities an opportunity to develop new and positive connections. The following profiles illustrate the benefits that service learning provides students and communities.

K-12 programs

In Paris, Arkansas, students participated in community service programs before the Learn and Serve initiative began. "With calling it service learning, the primary component that was needed was a reflection piece. And once that reflection piece was in place, the concept of service learning was in place," says Anne Sneed, **Star Program** Coordinator.

This past year, a greater emphasis has been placed on classroom infusion. "For it to really be sustained we felt that the infusion had to occur as part of our restructuring process," says Sneed.

Effective service learning programs involve youth in decision-making, giving them a sense of empowerment and ownership. In Arkansas, the State Department of Education includes youth in staff development training. Sneed credits Carolyn Elliot at the State Department of Education with doing "an excellent job trying to bridge the gap between youth and other generations."

Involving youth in decision-making leads to a sense of ownership and empowerment. The pride of ownership is one of the primary benefits of service learning programs, says Sneed. She gives the example of a group of high school girls who proposed to fix up and repaint the rest room. Over a year after their project was completed, the rest room has remained clean and well-kept.

Service learning projects have also helped improve school-community relationships. "We hear so much information about the bad things kids do, that for the children to be out and working in the community and doing constructive things that are very visible has really created a nice bridge with our community," says Sneed.

Service learning transforms the students' role as a passive recipient of knowledge and service to a more active role. At the **West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind**, this shift in roles has had a dramatic effect. "Here on this campus it was an idea that everybody immediately bought into because we are eager to turn the 'blind person/deaf person with their hand out' stereotype about handicapped people into these people being the givers of service—not necessarily the receivers all the time," says Connie Corder, Service Learning Mentor for the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind. "And it has made a difference in the lives of our children."

Students at the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind are involved in a number of projects. One project pairs blind children with senior citizens who need daily phone calls to check on their health and safety. By the end of the year, fifty-second phone checks have developed into ten- or fifteen-minute conversations between friends. In another project, teams of blind and deaf elementary students put on programs for public school students to help them understand what it is like to be blind or deaf.

"It is an ongoing program here and one that we think has made a difference in the way the kids feel about themselves and also the way the community feels about our kids," says Corder.

Although better described as a community learning program than a service learning program, the **PACERS Small Schools Cooperative** in Alabama exemplifies the ways that student

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Rural service learning programs

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projects can be designed to both enhance student learning and strengthen rural communities.

"Service learning implies that students learn something solely by doing pre-established community service," explains Jon Chalmers, PACERS Information and Documentation Program Coordinator. "We find that the learning takes place in collaboration and cooperation with the people in communities instead of a mandated service learning task. It seems to be a difference between working out of a sense of justice and working out of a sense of charity."

The PACERS Cooperative was formed jointly by a group called ACCESS (Alabama Citizens Coalition for Excellence in Small Schools) and the Program for Rural Services and Research at the University of Alabama. The PACERS Cooperative encourages ways to strengthen the ties between schools and the communities they serve.

Through its program, Better Schools Building Better Communities, the cooperative links school reform to community development. The program consists of three interrelated components. Genius of Place focuses on the study of their own communities. Sustaining Communities: Housing, Food, Good Work, and Health supports the viability of rural communities and helps students develop life skills. The third component, Joy, celebrates life in rural communities.

Through its programs, students in rural schools are building and selling computers, publishing community newspapers, practicing aquaculture, starting a day care, and building homes.

"When students have the opportunity to do academic work for a public audience, it raises the ante on students in a way that they like and appreciate," says Chalmers. "For example, we have so many students say when they are writing for their teacher in English class, they do not put as much effort into it as when they know that the paper is going to show up at every house in town."

Higher education programs

Service learning programs at colleges and universities also strengthen relationships between the institutions and the communities they serve. Some service learning programs like those at the University of Minnesota, Morris and Alpena Community College in Michigan serve the community in which they are located. Other colleges and universities also offer programs which place students in their home towns or in other rural communities within its service area.

Although volunteering and community service are not new to the **University of Minnesota, Morris** campus, an office to coordinate service learning activities was established for the first time this year.

"The university decided to launch a pilot project to determine if our students like service learning, if they really learn from it, and if we want to encourage faculty to do this," says Carol McCannon, Service Learning Coordinator, University of Minnesota, Morris.

With a grant from the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, a service learning pilot project to provide enrichment activities for local elementary schools students was developed. This past school year, ten university students from five different disciplines were paired with sixteen elementary school students. The program was originally designed as an early intervention program, providing one-on-one mentoring to children whose special talents and interests matched those of the mentors. Because the music mentors chose to work with a group of children to form a choir, more children were able to participate.

"It is much more than I even thought that it was going to be," says McCannon. "It is that good."

With positive results from the pilot project, McCannon is now working with faculty who are interested in developing a service learning component for existing courses.

"There are a lot of unbelievers who say that there is not enough to do in a rural area—that there aren't enough agencies and enough projects," says McCannon. "I'm going to prove these people wrong."

When **Alpena Community College** in Alpena, Michigan received a grant from the Michigan Community Service Commission in January 1993, Service Learning Coordinator Julie Smigelski began building the program from scratch.

She gathered information on other service learning programs by attending conferences and writing to other colleges and universities. Then she put a program together, pulling together bits and pieces from other programs across the country. "Everyone was willing to share information with us, and we would be happy to share information about our service learning program with other colleges," says Smigelski.

This summer, Alpena Community College will complete its first year of a three-year grant from the American Association of Community Colleges. This national networking initiative is part of the Corporation for National Service Higher Education: Learn and Serve program.

Students engage in a variety of projects from tutoring elementary school children to mentoring residents of area nursing homes. A nursing student involved in the senior mentoring project wrote: "This service learning project was an enormous learning experience for myself. Nobody could learn what I did from a textbook. People are such individuals—the hands on project impacted my life and definitely made me more compassionate to the needs of the elderly."

"Service learning is one of those unique programs that satisfies everyone's needs," says Smigelski. "It is a win-win situation. It's a great experience for our students, and it's good for our community."

Willamette University in Salem, Oregon has incorporated service learning into its required first year seminar, World Views, and is presently working on expanding the role of service learning within its curriculum.

Continued on last page

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Internet resources

Communications for a Sustainable Future
http://csf.colorado.edu/
gopher://csf.colorado.edu/
service-learning listserv

Communications for a Sustainable Future (CSF) is a collective effort to enhance communications on social issues through computer networking. The service learning section of the gopher and World Wide Web page provide information on postsecondary service learning programs and resources.

To subscribe to the service-learning listserv, e-mail listproc@csf.colorado.edu the following one-line message: SUBSCRIBE service-learning Your Name

Corporation for National Service
gopher://cyfer.esusda.gov/11/ace/cncs

Information on funding through the Corporation for National Service is available on this gopher.

National Service Learning Cooperative
gopher://gopher.nicsl.coled.umn.edu
nslck-12 listserv

The searchable gopher provides electronic access to many of the materials available through the National Service Learning Cooperative.

To subscribe to the listserv, e-mail listserv@vm1.spcs.umn.edu the following one-line message: SUBSCRIBE nslck-12 Your Name

American Association of Community Colleges
Service Learning Clearinghouse
One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 410
Washington, DC 20036-1176
phone (202) 728-0200 fax (202) 833-2467

The Service Learning Clearinghouse links community colleges interested in starting service-learning programs with others who have programs underway.

National Campus Compact
c/o Brown University, Box 1975
Providence, RI 02912
phone (401) 863-1119 fax (401) 863-3779
e-mail campus@compact.org

Campus Compact Center for Community Colleges
Mesa Community College
1833 W. Southern Avenue
Mesa, AZ 85202
phone (602) 461-7392 fax (602) 461-7806

The National Campus Compact is a coalition of over 300 college and university presidents. The Campus Compact, a project of the Education Commission of the States, provides technical assistance, training and grants to member organizations. Publications can be ordered by both members and non-members.

COOL (Campus Outreach Opportunity League)
1511 K Street, N.W.
Suite 307
Washington, DC 20005
phone (202) 637-7004 fax (202) 637-7021
e-mail COOL2YOU1@aol.com

COOL works with over 1,000 colleges and universities to create quality campus-based service programs. COOL provides technical assistance and support, hosts conferences, and publishes material on service and service learning.

Close Up Foundation
44 Canal Center Plaza
Alexandria, VA 22314
phone (703) 706-3640 fax (703) 706-0001

In partnership with the Constitutional Rights Foundation, the Close Up Foundation has developed and implemented Active Citizenship Today (ACT), a school-based service learning program. ACT materials are available for high school and middle school programs.

Constitutional Rights Foundation
601 South Kingsley Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90005
phone (213) 487-5590 fax (213) 386-0459

The Constitutional Rights Foundation offers staff development and publications on civic participation/service learning programs.

Corporation for National Service
1201 New York Avenue
Washington, DC 20525
phone (202) 606-5000
TDD (202) 606-5256

The Corporation for National Service administers the Learn and Serve America program, Americorps, and the National Service Corps.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
1030 Quarrier Street
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348
phone (800) 624-9120

ERIC/CRESS provides information on educational programs and practices dealing with rural residents, small schools, American Indians, migrant education, Mexican Americans, and outdoor education.

National Indian Youth Leadership Project
650 Vandenbosch Parkway
Gallup, NM 87301
phone (505) 722-9176 fax (505) 722-9794

The National Indian Youth Leadership Project provides technical assistance to Native American service learning programs. The project also hosts several camps and conferences for youth and adults.

National Service-Learning Cooperative
National Information Center for Service-Learning
R-290 Vo-Tech Building
1954 Buford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108
phone (800) 808-SERVE fax (612) 625-6277
e-mail serve@maroon.tc.umn.edu

The clearinghouse provides information on K-12 service learning programs, organizations engaged in promoting service-learning, and databases around the country; bibliographies and literature on service learning; lists of contact persons; searchable gopher server; and a listserv. (See electronic resources for more information.)

National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE)
3509 Haworth Drive, Suite 207
Raleigh, NC 27609-7299
phone (919) 787-3263 fax (919) 787-3381
e-mail info@nsee.pdial.interpath.net

NSEE is a membership association which works with schools, colleges, universities, and organizations to integrate experiential education into their programs. NSEE produces publications on service learning and experiential learning, hosts conferences, and provides consulting services.

National Youth Leadership Council
1910 West County Road B
Roseville, MN 55113
phone (612) 631-3672 fax (612) 631-2955

The National Youth Leadership Council provides technical assistance, training, and publications on service-learning.

National Dropout Prevention Center
Clemson University
205 Martin Street
Box 345111
Clemson, SC 29634
phone (803) 656-2599 fax (803) 656-0136

The National Dropout Prevention Center provides service-learning training for teachers, materials for staff development, searchable FOCUS Database on drop-out prevention (includes information on service-learning programs), and publications.

Rural service learning programs

Continued from page 2

"We are in the midst of a curriculum review," says Ron Krabill, Service Learning Coordinator, Willamette University. "It looks like within the next year or two the review will be completed and service learning will have a fairly significant role in the curriculum."

Students currently have the opportunity to participate in a number of service learning projects—both cocurricular and extracurricular—in Salem or in the outlying rural communities of Woodburn or Warm Springs Indian Reservation.

Working with Hispanic and Russian populations in Woodburn or Native Americans in Warm Springs gives students an opportunity to work with diverse groups. For students from urban areas, it may also be their first opportunity to experience what life is like in rural areas.

"I think that a lot of urban students have a concept of rural areas as being trouble-free, and I think that it is good for them to recognize that this is not the case," says Krabill.

Fostering a sense of citizenship and compassion is another benefit of service learning, and one that is not addressed by other forms of experiential learning. "The opportunity to make the theory real is crucial, but I think that they also get that experience in other ways," says Krabill.

"Service learning also creates the opening to develop a sense of compassion and citizenship. I also think that a lot of people in general feel that things are hopeless and that you can't do anything about it. And that feeling is strongest when you aren't involved. It's important for students to get involved early on in their lives to realize that there are concrete steps that can be taken in order to solve problems."

For the past nine years, teams of **Kansas State University** students have worked with communities on projects ranging from conducting archeological surveys to setting up a volunteer newspaper.

"Over the years, we have become known not only as a student service program, but also as a community development program, because the projects we work on are seen by the communities as being essential to their survival and well-being," says Carol Peak, Kansas State University Community Service Program Director.

Over the years, the project has added an international component by placing foreign exchange students on the student teams and sending teams to communities in Kansas as well as Mexico, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica.

Work on the projects begins with a preparation class held in the spring semester. A pool of faculty members prepares the students to work with members of rural communities and helps the students develop the skills they will need to carry out their projects.

"I think that every year our expectations are far exceeded by the work that the students turn out," says Peak. "The strength of the team model—pulling together an interdisciplinary team with a variety of skills, adding a faculty component to that, and then having team members live in the communities and take ownership over their projects—produces a synergistic effect. And the outcome is often times much more than we are used to seeing, for instance, in class projects here."

With grants from the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Learn and Serve America, **Concordia College** in Moorhead, Minnesota developed a program, the Rural Reinvestment Project (RIP), to help students develop and implement community service projects in their home towns.

Students participating in the program enrolled in Preparation for Rural Community Service during the spring semester. The course was designed to give interested students a grounding in rural issues, problems, and opportunities. During the course, students designed a community service project, selected a community mentor, and made preliminary plans. Over the summer, students returned to their home towns and implemented their projects.

During the three years the program was offered, student projects ranged from coordinating a needs assessment for after-school child care in the community to linking local businesses and high school students in apprenticeship activities.

Through these service learning programs and others across rural America, students are answering President Clinton's challenge "to believe that you can contribute to your community and your country. In doing so, you will find the best in yourself and learn lessons about life that you might not learn in any other way."

The **Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development**, a national effort to improve rural access to continued education, serves community and state colleges, universities, cooperative extensions, libraries, schools, rural health advocates, community based organizations, and community/economic development providers.

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